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Chairman: Mr. Galluska ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda Item 111: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions *(continued)* (A/54/12 and Add.1, A/54/91, A/54/98, A/54/99, A/54/285, A/54/286, A/54/414, A/54/469-S/1999/1063)

1. **Ms. Korneliouk** (Belarus) commended the high quality of the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/54/12/Add.1) and said that migration flows, which had a national but also regional and international character influenced the stability and safety of societies. She emphasized that in Belarus the official figure for illicit migrants from CIS, Asian, African and Near and Middle Eastern countries was more than 50,000.

2. In view of the socio-economic repercussions of that situation, Belarus sought to regulate the flow of refugees and migrants by the adoption of various laws the provisions of which were in accordance with those of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. An interdepartmental committee on migration issues had been set up in 1997 to coordinate the actions of ministries and other public agencies with regard to migration policies. Furthermore, in July 1998 Belarus had instituted a procedure for the granting of refugee status.

3. The process begun at the 1996 Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States had proved its effectiveness and had to a large extent determined the policy of the countries members of CIS in the matter. The countries of the region, including Belarus, believed that the implementation of the Programme of Action should be extended beyond the year 2000. Belarus expressed appreciation to the Minsk office of UNHCR for the assistance it had provided to it at all levels and stressed the vital nature of its cooperation with UNHCR. Belarus also believed that international cooperation in all issues relating to refugees and displaced persons should be expanded and intensified.

4. **Monsignor Martino** (Observer for the Holy See), recalling that displaced persons did not enjoy the protection of international law, said that the international community should come to their assistance by adopting a legal instrument to ensure their protection. The adoption of such an instrument was the more urgent since current conflicts were developing in a dangerous way, frequently giving rise to attempts to annihilate whole communities and attacks on displaced persons, refugee camps and humanitarian personnel.

5. The international community was currently focusing on the problem of refugees, to whom it provided only protection and humanitarian assistance. The problems could not be resolved without taking into account all the human and political aspects of the situation and taking appropriate action.

6. Firstly, in order to prevent forced displacement and avert new conflicts, it might be advisable to employ quick preventive diplomacy and build up a culture of peace to create awareness of the profoundly destructive nature of war. Similarly, in order to ensure that most conflicts were shorter and less destructive, an end should be put to illegal arms trafficking, especially with regard to small arms.

7. Secondly, most conflicts were due to the fact that the international community had failed for too long to promote integral development in a region or a State, whose population then became prey to despair and violence. Priority should therefore be given to promoting development and eliminating poverty.

8. Thirdly, refugees were often a very heavy burden on the host countries, which were most often developing countries. The international community could not let those countries assume that burden alone.

9. Fourthly, impunity for those who starved and caused the forced displacement of whole populations could prompt further escalation of violence. Bringing them to justice come what might, as the international community had shown itself resolved to do by creating a permanent international criminal court, would undoubtedly make it possible to limit the number of humanitarian catastrophes. Reconciling the parties to a conflict and consolidating peace was an impossible task when those responsible for humanitarian catastrophes were not answerable for their crimes.

10. Fifthly, peace agreements should contain provisions guaranteeing the repatriation and social reintegration of refugees and displaced persons in

safety during the peace-building process, and United Nations mission personnel should be invested with the necessary powers to that end.

11. Lastly, sixthly, one of the most tragic forms of discrimination at the present time, which could at any moment plunge whole populations into misery, was the denial to ethnic groups and national minorities of the fundamental right to exist as such. The international community could judge no effort too great when it was a question of putting an end to such abuses, which were violations of human dignity.

12. **Mr. Malik-Aslanov** (Azerbaijan) said that, as a result of Armenia's military aggression against Azerbaijan, there were currently 1 million refugees and displaced persons in the country, out of a total Azerbaijani population of 8 million. The Armenian aggression was also responsible for the human casualties, material losses, decline in production and rising inflation and unemployment that had considerably reduced the ability of the Azerbaijani State to provide aid to the most vulnerable groups, including refugees, returnees and displaced persons. Furthermore, extensive damage had been inflicted on the buildings and monuments in the part of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia, as the United Nations and other international organizations had been informed.

13. Azerbaijan was committed to the unconditional implementation of the ceasefire until a political agreement was concluded and sincerely desired to see progress in the peace negotiations, as was demonstrated by the fact that the President of Azerbaijan, during the visit of the Chairman-in-Office of OSCE, had announced that all Armenian prisoners of war would be unconditionally released.

14. Azerbaijan hoped that the international organizations would provide it with the support necessary to conclude peace with Armenia and allow the refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes as quickly as possible. He agreed with UNHCR that the issue of refugees should be permanently settled when the conflict was resolved but was not in complete agreement with the suggestion that refugees should be integrated into the places of their actual stay, since he believed that such integration could hinder their return to the Azerbaijani territory currently occupied by Armenia. He believed that the vital needs of such persons should be satisfied and that they should be allowed to undertake agricultural work, albeit on an interim basis.

15. In September 1999, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had visited Azerbaijan and had met the President of the Republic and other State officials. Azerbaijan was grateful to UNHCR for the assistance that it had provided to the displaced persons and refugees in Azerbaijan, which had helped to save thousands of lives. It was also grateful for the appeals UNHCR had made to donor countries to provide funds for that assistance, in particular the 1999 appeal which had produced $12 million, a great deal more than in the previous year.

16. The Azerbaijani Government was also highly appreciative of the work of the United Nations specialized agencies, in particular the work carried out within the framework of the programme of emergency humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan. Contacts with those agencies had been increased at different levels. In March 1999 in particular, there had been an exchange of views between Azerbaijani officials and the Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe of UNHCR. On that occasion, the latter, having mentioned that the period covered by the Programme of Action adopted by the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States would expire in 2000, had requested the Azerbaijani authorities to clarify their position on preparations for and the holding of a new conference in July 2000 at Geneva.

17. While favouring the holding of such a regional conference, Azerbaijan had let it be known that it could not accept the geographical scope or the provisions of certain documents, in particular with respect to the responsibility of States towards refugees and displaced persons in their territory. He believed that, if the problems of refugees were to be resolved, it was essential to know whether they had fled their country because it was being torn apart by civil war or because it was under attack by another State. Since the existence of Azerbaijani refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijani territory was unquestionably the result of the conflict with Armenia, the Azerbaijani Government believed that the Armenian Government should indemnify Azerbaijan for the material, physical and moral damages suffered.

18. Azerbaijan took the opportunity to urge donor countries to continue the generosity they had shown in the past and to do their utmost to implement the agreed projects and programmes of assistance, thereby assisting Azerbaijan in tackling its current difficulties and helping it to enable its refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes.

19. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that it was the countries of the southern hemisphere that suffered most from the movement of refugees and displaced persons, because most refugees were from developing countries which, despite their limited resources, were the commonest host countries. The international community therefore had a moral responsibility to help UNHCR to successfully carry out its mandate, a task which was made successively more difficult every year by the constant increase in the number of refugees and the systematic reduction of financial resources.

20. The African countries were the most directly affected by flows of refugees, and the social, economic and political repercussions were as hard on the populations as on the States. In that regard, the international community should abandon its selective attitude and resolve to supply African refugees with the same volume of assistance with which it provided to refugees from other continents. There could not be first-class and second-class refugees: anyone who lost their home deserved compassion and solidarity. The African refugees were not making unreasonable demands; they simply wished the international community to supply their basic needs while they waited to return home.

21. Furthermore, in Africa, the political settlement of conflicts and putting in place of policies and mechanisms for the consolidation of peace were not sufficient to eliminate the suffering of refugees, gradually reduce their numbers and allow them to be permanently repatriated under decent conditions. The continent, which was undertaking a major effort to boost its economy, must also be helped to combat the poverty, destitution and illness that frequently forced whole populations into exile.

22. It should be noted that Africa had clearly indicated to the international community at the recent Algiers Summit that it was determined to provide African refugees with the greatest possible assistance by adopting a decision that, inter alia, invited States members of OAU to implement the Declaration and recommendations of the Ministerial Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Africa held in December 1998 at Khartoum; urged the international community to help African countries to formulate and implement projects and programmes to benefit refugees; and called upon States members of OAU to take the measures necessary to strengthen security in the camps and ensure the protection of humanitarian personnel, it being understood that humanitarian organizations must respect the internal legislation of the countries in which they operated.

23. Solidarity with those suffering from poverty, persecution and the rigours of nature was a well established tradition in Africa and a rule of conduct which no African State had ever disregarded. Africa, demonstrating its faithfulness to its ancestral values based on humanism and brotherhood, had honoured, during the Algiers summit, two of those countries, celebrated African Refugees Day on 20 June each year, and had adopted, 30 years earlier, a convention on refugees.

24. Faithful to those values, the Algerian people, who themselves had been in part reduced to exile during the most difficult moments of their war of national liberation, had never refused assistance to those requesting asylum and protection. Algeria would therefore continue to provide its aid and humanitarian assistance to the Saharan refugees pending a final settlement of the conflict in the Western Sahara. It was glad that the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees had been able to begin carrying out the mandate entrusted to it under the Settlement Plan for the Western Sahara and the Houston Agreements concluded by the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO.

25. **Ms. Otiti** (Uganda) expressed satisfaction with the ongoing collaboration between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the other agencies, particularly the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which had always reacted positively to the difficult situation of refugees. Very much concerned about the welfare of refugees, Uganda would continue to cooperate with the Office and the other agencies in order to provide those persons with living conditions that were as comfortable as possible. As a member of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's

Programme, Uganda would help to focus and support the efforts made by the Office to enhance the effectiveness of its management and rationalize its structure and budgetary procedures.

26. **Ms. Di Felice** (Venezuela) noted with concern that, owing to the numerous conflicts in the world, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was intervening more and more in order to provide humanitarian assistance and ensure the protection of refugees. It was essentially the obligation of States to prevent population displacements and establish security conditions permitting the return of their nationals on the basis of their free consent. Venezuela fully supported the integrated approach designed to ensure effective cooperation among Governments, international organizations, cooperation and financing agencies, civil society and UNHCR not only to find solutions to the refugee problem, which was essential, but also to ensure development. In that regard, her delegation welcomed the Brookings process initiated by the High Commissioner and the President of the World Bank, which reflected the need to set up an expanded joint framework making it possible to establish closer links between humanitarian aid and long-term development. That cooperation should aim not only to cope with crisis situations, but also to prevent them, since peace and stability were closely linked to the refugee problem. It was also necessary to strengthen international instruments on the protection of refugees as well as cooperation between States and the Office in order to ensure the progressive development of international law in that field. Furthermore, criteria should be defined for responding to particular situations with UNHCR assistance, particularly with regard to protecting displaced persons within their country.

27. Venezuela followed with interest the discussions on the concept of international solidarity and burden sharing which were taking place within the Executive Committee. The concept of an integral framework for seeking solutions to various phases of the problem, from the outbreak of a crisis to the return of the refugees to their country of origin, should be defined in detail and should include their protection during displacement and the right of asylum. The Venezuelan Government was ready to continue its cooperation with the Office and honour the commitments that it had made at the international level. It hoped that the major programmes planned by UNHCR would be completed through the indispensable contributions of the countries which had the most resources and had always been the Office's mainstay.

28. **Ms. Plepyte** (Lithuania) said that the recent crises in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had resulted in flows of refugees and mass population displacements, which reminded one of the fragile situation in many regions of the world. The complex nature of those conflicts required commitments on the part of the entire international community in order to seek solutions. Lithuania had made its own contribution to assisting Kosovo refugees by accepting a number of displaced persons, providing humanitarian assistance, mostly in food aid, and sending doctors to take part in refugee relief activities. While those efforts were limited, it should be kept in mind that Lithuania had become a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees only two years earlier and that its action in the Kosovo crisis had been an important step towards active involvement in international cooperation.

29. Her delegation emphasized the initiatives undertaken jointly by Lithuania and UNHCR in order to raise public awareness of refugee issues among the Lithuanian population and provide assistance to asylum seekers. Lithuania also supported the campaign launched by the High Commissioner to encourage States to accede to the 1951 Convention and other relevant instruments, and, in that regard, congratulated Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, which had recently become parties to the Convention.

30. Measures to fight trafficking in persons and the smuggling of immigrants was another important field of international cooperation. That problem was particularly acute in the Balkan region, which had become a transit point for the illicit transfer of immigrants from the East to Western Europe and the Nordic countries. Lithuania had taken urgent measures to protect its State borders and initiated mutually beneficial cooperation with the countries of the European Union. The Nordic countries had thus substantially assisted Lithuania in strengthening its institutional mechanisms and finding long-term solutions to illegal immigration. Her Government, which also supported readmission as a key instrument for the effective prevention of illegal immigration, had concluded bilateral agreements with States members of the European Union, the Nordic countries and some Central European countries for that purpose, and had

invited its neighbours — Belarus and the Russian Federation — to sign readmission agreements with Lithuania.

31. **Ms. Gligorova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) noted with regret that, instead of being celebrated for the development of democracy, the last year of the millennium, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of basic humanitarian law standards, was characterized by brutal violations of obligations undertaken under the Geneva Convention. The Kosovo crisis had caused a major humanitarian disaster, the consequences of which were still threatening the stability and security of the entire region. Because of that crisis, which had caught the international community by surprise, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had had to host thousands of refugees, who accounted for 18 per cent of its population. The influx of refugees, who had been granted the status of humanitarian assisted persons, had been a factor of destabilization for the country. However, under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, all States parties were obliged to share that burden. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia therefore hoped that the international community would help to ease the damage done to its economy as a result of that crisis. The country had so far received only limited financial compensation.

32. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was the only country in the region that was still confronted with the refugee crisis. The international community should make greater efforts to ensure the return of the refugees to their countries once appropriate conditions for that had been created. With regard to their status in Macedonia, the Ministry of the Interior had recently ceased to issue permits for the stay of the humanitarian assisted persons, all of whom were expected to leave the country by 28 March 2000. The Government had called on all new refugees and those already living in the country to register at the latest by 15 November with a view to preparations for their return.

33. The Kosovo Roma refugees were in an extremely difficult situation because they had been expelled from their homes and their houses had been set on fire and looted. A more decisive reaction of the international forces in Kosovo was indispensable in order to reverse such developments. On the one hand, conditions were not appropriate for their safe return to Kosovo, and, on the other hand, UNHCR did not offer any opportunity for their transfer to a third country; the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, their home country, seemed unconcerned about their situation.

34. Cooperation between the Government, governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations and international agencies had been of crucial importance during the Kosovo refugee crisis. It was essential to ensure the recovery and reconstruction of the region. In that context, emphasis should be placed on the determining role played by the Stability Pact for Southern Europe in the achievement of a stable democratic society and economic prosperity in the region. Those principles were in accordance with Macedonia's constructive foreign policy, which was directed towards speedy democratization and full integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, development of good-neighbourly relations among the Balkan States, and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of States and for human rights. The international community should help to alleviate the negative repercussions of the Kosovo tragic crisis on all States of the region in order to prevent new conflicts and support hopes of a better future.

35. **Mr. Prasad** (India) said that humanitarian action and protection of refugees were vast and complex tasks that required a careful balanced approach focused firmly on humanitarian objectives. In fact, as had been seen recently, hasty and precipitous actions inevitably created problems. As the High Commissioner had stressed, it was regrettable that certain situations that attracted political and media attention at a particular moment could make heavy claims on available resources and compromise the action of the international community in cases such as the situation of refugees in Africa where international aid was most urgent. The problem of refugees was quintessentially a humanitarian issue, and States and other concerned actors had, under the Charter of the United Nations, the legal and moral responsibility to address it collectively. The international community should replace narrow legalistic concepts by global solutions and rhetoric by concrete actions.

36. India shared the concerns expressed by the High Commissioner in her report (A/54/12) concerning increasing non-respect by certain States of the basic tenets of refugee protection, including the principle of non-refoulement. That was a disquieting trend, and the wave of restrictive practices in the most prosperous parts of the world — border closures, interdictions at sea, expulsions, premature returns and recourse to

concepts such as "safe country of origin" or "safe third country" — had undesirable implications for the protection of refugees worldwide.

37. A large number of developing countries continued to honour their humanitarian obligation in spite of limited resources and the effects that the presence of millions of people might have on their fragile economic and social fabric. It was essential to address their needs as a matter of priority and to enhance global cooperation and burden-sharing so that those countries might retain their traditional willingness and openness to the refugee problem.

38. Just as there had to be a focus on the root causes of the refugee phenomenon, including endemic poverty in many parts of the world, there had to be a method of ensuring transition from humanitarian assistance to rehabilitation of the countries concerned. The most effective approach available to the international community for preventing humanitarian crises was perhaps through investments in the economies of the countries of origin of refugees. While it was true that gross violations of human rights could generate massive refugee flows, putting in place early warning systems or intrusive international surveillance was not the way to address the problem. India favoured dialogue, cooperation and national capacity-building to prevent that type of situation, but it believed that all actions aimed at peacemaking and peacekeeping should be strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

39. One body of opinion would [illegible]e the accession of States to certain instruments as a measure of their commitment to the refugee issue. That was a narrow and restrictive way of looking at things, and the fact that India had not signed the 1951 Convention relative to the Status of Refugees was due to its belief that that instrument did not address the problem of massive refugee flows or factors such as mixed migration which accompanied such flows. Nevertheless, India hosted a large number of refugees and financed programs relating to them from its own resources. At all times it had abided by the principles of protection and non-refoulement.

40. India shared the concerns expressed by the High Commissioner concerning the safety of humanitarian personnel. It believed that responsibility in that area lay with States and that any international intervention to ensure such security, where absolutely essential, should be in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.

41. **Mr. Ingolfsson** (Iceland) said that Iceland had taken part in the international effort to assist refugees by regularly receiving groups of refugees from various countries. To help them adjust to their new life, his Government provided them with an occupational and social integration programme for one year and offered them language courses especially designed for them. It also offered half-day courses on the usage and customs of Icelandic society, a schedule which allowed them to work the rest of the day if they had refugee status and a work permit. In addition, the Icelandic Red Cross had introduced a support programme in 1979 for refugees to help them become integrated with Icelandic people as soon as they arrived. Under that very successful programme, when refugees arrived in Iceland the Icelandic Red Cross called for volunteers to assist them. It chose at least three families for each refugee or refugee family. The families visited the refugees, helped them to learn practical things about the local society and provided them with moral support. Some agencies were currently considering whether similar support could be offered to immigrants, who often had problems similar to those of refugees.

42. His Government had recently concluded a formal cooperation agreement with the Icelandic Red Cross, which provided that the latter would take responsibility for assisting in dealing with asylum-seekers, while the Government agreed to work on new legislation to increase the social protection of foreigners, including refugees, and to accept that some training be given by the police force of the UNHCR Regional Office for the Nordic and Baltic States to Icelandic officials working with refugees.

43. **Mr. Lordkipanidze** (Georgia) said that the problem of refugees and forcibly displaced persons often exposed the inadequacy of national and international institutional and normative frameworks. UNHCR was facing manifold challenges, owing in particular to the increasing magnitude of intra-State conflicts around the world. He welcomed UNHCR efforts to strengthen its emergency response and assistance capabilities and to protect refugee women, children and adolescents, together with its work aimed at integrating environmental issues into its activities. It was significant that the Security Council, in its debates on the protection of civilians and children in armed conflicts, had endorsed that integrated and more robust

approach to the protection of refugees. Such activities, together with the UNHCR guidelines on specific refugee concerns, fostered the development of international refugee, human rights and humanitarian law.

44. The tireless and courageous efforts of the UNHCR field office in Georgia to alleviate the suffering of tens of thousands of displaced persons from Abkhazia, Georgia, were constrained by the lack of progress towards peace. The affirmation that the return of displaced persons was purely a humanitarian and not a political issue could not offer effective relief to the 250,000 persons concerned, 40,000 of whom were being displaced for the second time from the Gali region of Abkhazia. Widespread and systematic human rights violations, drug trafficking and arms smuggling had become a normal part of life in the territory controlled by the Abkhaz separatists, and more than 1,600 persons had died since the last ceasefire in 1994. In those conditions, his Government had had no choice but to seek security guarantees, including international ones, to secure the return of the refugees and displaced persons in Abkhazia, Georgia. To that end, the potential of the human rights office in Sukhumi, the only recourse available to displaced persons to redress human rights violations in the zone of conflict, could be better utilized. His delegation would welcome a more vigorous and systematic monitoring of the human rights situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, and more effective collaboration between the office of UNHCR and that of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Georgia, whose mandates overlapped.

45. Impunity for human rights violations and the unwillingness or inability of the Abkhaz separatists to cope with criminality were the main factors contributing to the current explosive situation in the zone of conflict. Finding remedies to redress those violations would help to restore confidence between the parties and thereby revitalize the peace process. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which were applicable to both State and non-State actors, laid a solid basis for bridging the gap in the legal status of such persons.

46. The history of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, had proved that the issue of the return of displaced persons could not be separated from the general context of the peace process. More consideration should therefore be given to the elaboration of a temporary status for returnees in the Gali region to ensure protection of their basic rights.

47. UNHCR was actively engaged in monitoring the well-being of returnees and in facilitating their reintegration in many countries. In particular, the execution of the UNDP project on post-conflict peace-building, in cooperation with UNHCR, had yielded positive results in the Tskhinvali region of South Ossetia, Georgia. UNHCR was rendering valuable support to the Georgian authorities in dealing with the complex issue of restitution of property for the Ossetian refugees and displaced persons. The gradual shift away from humanitarian relief to assistance projects aimed at strengthening the self-reliance of the displaced population from Abkhazia was another aspect of the changing activities of UNHCR in Georgia.

48. His Government reaffirmed its commitment to continuing the dialogue with UNDP, the World Bank and UNHCR on new approaches to assistance for internally displaced persons, including the provision of medium- and long-term assistance to displaced persons from Abkhazia, Georgia.

49. **Mr. Smagulov** (Kazakhstan) said that the only way to deal with population movements caused by armed conflicts, ethnic tensions and religious extremism, and with the need to resettle people from areas where ecological disasters had taken place was to develop a partnership and improve coordination among the activities of the different international agencies and joint projects and programmes. To support the efforts of UNHCR, which could not cope with all the problems alone, States should enhance their cooperation activities, particularly at the regional level.

50. Bearing in mind that donors had reduced their contributions to UNHCR programmes, it was important to make the best possible use of the available resources and develop inter-agency programmes. Priority should also be given to preventive activities, in particular by building States' national capacities in centres of instability, especially in the central Asian region. It was essential for UNHCR to promote a constructive exchange of views among the Government, national human rights bodies, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the private sector.

51. Welcoming the efforts of UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IMO) to implement General Assembly resolution 53/123, his

delegation noted that a resolution extending the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States would shortly be submitted to the Third Committee. Although his delegation had expressed the position of principle of the central Asian States on that subject at the last meeting of the Working Group in Geneva, he wished to reaffirm the importance of respecting transparency and equity in the sharing of resources within the Conference.

52. The region of Central Asia had had to cope with a huge influx of Afghan refugees — in the past three years their numbers had more than quadrupled — in addition to the refugees from Tajikistan. Since its limited resources did not allow it to increase customs and border checkpoints, the region of central Asia had become a transit corridor for clandestine migration and the illegal shipment of drugs and arms; unless something was done about it, the situation was likely to deteriorate.

53. Being an environmental disaster area, the region of Central Asia was very interested in the programmes jointly undertaken by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration and it again emphasized the need for national capacity-building. UNHCR could develop the environmental component of its programmes in the region by making use of the experience acquired in similar programmes launched in other regions of the world.

54. As a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Kazakhstan hoped that the OSCE summit which was to be held shortly in Istanbul would provide an opportunity for strengthening the partnership with the European countries so as to regulate the flow of refugees.

55. Kazakhstan was a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the protocol thereto of 1967, and it was in the process of preparing national legislation which would be in keeping with the provisions of that instrument; its bureau for population and migration was working to implement the presidential decree on the main goals of the migration policy until the year 2005.

56. While commending the actions of the UNHCR Office in Kazakhstan, he said that it should place greater emphasis on projects designed to produce concrete results and using its financial resources more effectively.

57. **Ms. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that while the number of people of concern to UNHCR had decreased slightly during 1998 as compared to 1997, UNHCR had been confronted with a large number of emergencies as a result of armed conflicts and gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Respect for human rights, notably those of minorities, and good governance based on democratic inclusiveness would have made it possible to avoid refugee outflows of the magnitude that had been seen in Kosovo and, recently, in East Timor.

58. Voluntary repatriation had thus far been the preferred method of assisting refugees to return to their countries of origin. However, the return of lasting peace and security and the reconstruction of infrastructure were prerequisites for helping refugees rebuild their lives. In that connection, it was imperative that the international community should encourage affected countries to implement peace agreements that had been negotiated in good faith; such encouragement could take the form of political pressure, support for peacekeeping arrangements or development aid to strengthen the peace-building. Warring factions should, for their part, endeavour to make the necessary sacrifices in order to strengthen the peace process.

59. Her delegation was concerned about the increasing difficulties refugees were having in finding safe havens due to the erosion of accepted principles for refugee protection as a result of the restrictive asylum policies adopted mainly in developed countries. While it was true that some people committed abuses that was no justification for denying sanctuary to refugees and asylum-seekers who were fleeing persecution or armed conflict. Her delegation called on all countries to respect international principles of refugee protection and to refrain from acts, such as refoulement, unlawful expulsion and unjustified detention, that posed a threat to the security of refugees. It hoped that UNHCR would increase public awareness of the new UNHCR guidelines on detention.

60. Ghana had a long tradition of welcoming people who had fled their own country because of civil war or political persecution. In recent years it had welcomed a

number of refugees from the subregion, particularly from Liberia, Togo and Sierra Leone; the assistance had been provided at considerable cost to its economy given Ghana's own limited resources. Together with other countries in the subregion, it had put in place mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts so as to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees and displaced persons. The cost of those mechanisms had been a great burden on the countries of the subregion.

61. Although the countries of West Africa had not been denied support by the international community, the assistance had not been given with the same zeal as in the case of Kosovo and East Timor. While recognizing the need for international solidarity and burden-sharing in dealing with refugee problems, her delegation felt that the international community must bear in mind the enormous burden that refugees placed on host countries that were engaged on the difficult path towards sustainable development.

62. She recalled that the security of refugees had been undermined in recent years by the infiltration of armed elements into refugee camps, and that humanitarian workers had been kidnapped or killed, often by the very people they had gone to help. Her delegation viewed that development with grave concern and it urged States to uphold the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements. As to those who targeted humanitarian workers for attack, their actions were simply unacceptable.

63. Her delegation wished to express its appreciation to UNHCR and UNICEF for their joint programme to reunite unaccompanied minors with their families. It noted with satisfaction that it was UNHCR policy not to give refugee children in emergency context for adoption. A child who had been separated from its family was not an orphan and therefore efforts to reunite such a child with its family, including members of the extended family, must always be pursued.

64. Her delegation noted with concern that contributions to the UNHCR budget had been declining for the past two years and it appealed to members of the donor community to increase their contributions so as to enable the High Commissioner to carry out her mandate. Finally, she expressed her delegation's singular appreciation to UNHCR, UNDP and WFP for their reintegration programmes for returnees in Africa.

65. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Angola), after reiterating his delegation's full support for the statement made by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, said that following the destabilizing action waged by a group that sought to seize power by force, more than one third of the population of Angola had been displaced; more than one million refugees were living in neighbouring countries and the malnutrition rate was rising daily. In an attempt to restore order, the Government had launched a military and humanitarian campaign designed to end the war and provide assistance to all refugees and displaced persons. Accordingly, it had undertaken an emergency support plan, allocating $55 million for the purchase of foodstuffs and agricultural tools in order to help the displaced population resettle and to assist the abandoned children. However, that would not be enough and his delegation therefore appealed to the donor States and to the international community in general to increase their multiform support of the programmes so as to assist the Government in its efforts together with UNHCR, WFP and other agencies and non-governmental organizations. Angola would then be able to help not only its own refugees and displaced persons but also the refugees from other countries, to whom it had given shelter.

The meeting rose at 12 noon.